EMA Survey Results:
Energy Management & Covid-19

No one could have predicted that the new decade would start with such a challenge and that a couple of months into 2020 we will find ourselves in such unprecedented circumstances. The majority of energy management world is on lockdown and everyone has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in some way. For some, the lockdown meant a gradual close-down of operations, while others shut down in a rush. Many organisations still play a critical role and must continue to operate, even if with restricted operations.

The EMA sounded out its membership on the impact of the pandemic on their operations and teams, as well as their reflections and tips on how to cope during this period. Energy management is often about pitfalls and opportunities, and the survey responses suggest that energy managers are already identifying the highs and lows that the lockdown is presenting. Whether it is the fact that the energy consumption and travel have gone down, or that there is more time available to develop future policies and proposals, here are the most frequent responses from the survey...

The lockdown - direct effects:

It is more a case of Business as Required rather than Business as Usual.

The focus on energy reduction is relaxed during this period as the main focus is on dealing with the pandemic.

Many of the planned energy improvement initiatives we had planned for 2020 are currently on hold.

We are unable to trade, 95% of the business is in shutdown.

Now having twice weekly conference calls with directors to update on cash flow and billing for energy and water. So, that's a bonus.

Energy saving projects are affected due to the reduced on-site presence. We are attempting to maintain activity where possible. Operation & maintenance of renewable generation assets is business as usual. Resource levels aren't affecting this part of the team, yet.

Everything back to 1975 pace. I am old enough to remember those days...

Projects have stopped. Some meters can't be read.

All sites and offices are all fully closed down with all heating and electric equipment switched off.

We cancelled any non-essential presence-based tasks (on-site auditing, routine meetings etc.) and prioritised operational, financial and business continuity activities.

Government measures seemed to have increased water consumption across Wales, which is increasing energy demand.

The lockdown - tips to consider:

Energy management is not the top of everyone's list of 'important' things to do at the moment' - be pushy.

Continue a water flushing regime and heat water to prevent the proliferation of bacterial growth in water systems.

Look for opportunities - there are some things you can't do right now. What could you do which you otherwise might have made time for? I'm thinking about future energy strategy for the site and catching up on some data analysis.

Ensure skeleton staff know and understand the changes made.

The lockdown will enable true base loads to be measured. Identify plant/equipment that should be switched off which will assist in setting reduced targets.

The hiatus in work frees up time to focus on time consuming measures such as writing in depth policies, it could actually prove a useful chance to broaden the energy management strategy.

Continuous data review - ensure that all sites are shutdown correctly, especially the ones that benefit from a BMS, as this could affect consumption going forward if indeed any scheduling has not been reviewed.

Ensure staff are aware of procedures for shutting the office back down should they need to go in and use it for any reason.

Consider what interim maintenance needs to be carried out even though the building is shutdown.

Daily monitoring of sub-meters has identified areas of focus. Skeleton teams are given specific tasks to check areas.

Continue to work on business cases, etc. in the background, but now is not the time to promote these.

The lockdown and beyond:

Remote working might become more prevalent. The majority of systems including M&T and BMS can all be accessed remotely, meaning most tasks can be completed. Rapid increase in use of video conferencing etc. has shown that these can be effective means of communication.

The price of oil, electricity and gas has collapsed. This could temporarily weaken the impact of energy management on an organisation, particularly if bottom lines have also suffered and staff resources are being downsized.

As the economy struggles to recover, then energy management practices may be lower down the pecking order than previous compared to other perceived priority obligations of organisations. It will be difficult to ensure that energy management is considered to be worthwhile exercise and management personnel will not have this high on the agenda.

It will highlight the environmental changes which are visible in the current situation (such as noise and air quality).

It will be a good measure of what can be achieved in a complete 'switch-off' scenario, perhaps leading to a better and more considerate energy management behaviours going forward.

Energy use in work premises will be greatly reduced raising fundamental questions around working practices and future use of work spaces. For example, why lease a large office building if you had a rotor of people working from home. Business travel, currently virtually zero - companies need to revisit the need for business travel and develop guidance to significantly reduce this in the future. The current situation shows that business meetings can effectively be carried out remotely.

Postponing implementing energy saving measures and potentially shelving them to free up cash to recover from impact the virus has had on the business.

Once re-opened it should be business as normal, however more emphasis may be on saving costs to make up for lost business.

The main impact is delayed decision making for medium to long term plans. Getting the executive team to re-focus on long term plans is hard anyway and in the current climate impossible. However, that doesn't stop me getting the papers ready now so that when we can think ahead again, we have options.

Thank you for taking part.

An ideal opportunity to look at base energy loads of buildings and examine areas of energy wastage and make comparisons with operational figures. Also, the need for buildings / overall capacity related to staff numbers could be fundamentally rethought in relation to home working.

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On a lighter note:

Don't sit too close to the fridge!

How are we going to get haircuts?

Have to talk to my wife a lot more!!

EMA Survey Results

Energy Management & Covid-19:

Part 2 - easing of the lockdown

As the lockdown measures continue to ease, the EMA has once again reached out to the energy management community for their experiences and opinions in the next phase of the pandemic.

PARTICIPANTS

72% In-house
28% Energy service providers

WORKLOAD DURING THE PANDEMIC

34% Same workload
42% More workload
5% Less workload
19% Affected by furlough

HOW DO THE PARTICIPANTS SEE THEIR ROLE CHANGING IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

New challenges with new ways of working that still need to be defined - but generally workloads have increased significantly for us already.

Don't know yet. Probably more working from home and a lot less budget.

Voluntary shorter working week - 4 days and a lot more web-based meetings.

Resources are likely to be squeezed as the business recovers financially from the 2020 season. Pressures on existing team are therefore likely to grow.

Not massively. Continued emphasis on reporting and analysis, highlighting potential cost savings and potentially reduced project load onsite.

COVID-19 EFFECT ON ENERGY MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

Projects	Ongoing	Approved	Planned
Not affected at all	7%	-	14%
Paused	25%	7%	29%
Deferred (unknown)	35%	46%	40%
Deferred (specific)	14%	18%	4%
Cancelled	4%	7%	-
Not sure	7%	7%	14%

*The survey results are based on multiple choice answers.

MAIN REASONS FOR WHY PROJECTS WERE AFFECTED

50% Social distancing
43% Building closures
32% Budget needed elsewhere

COVID-19 EFFECT ON BUDGETS ALLOCATED TO ENERGY MANAGEMENT

25% Not affected at all
7% Increased
50% Reduced
11% Taken away
11% Not sure

Being local government, I would foresee a greater impact starting from next financial year rather than this as this is when the financial impact will really start to be felt for us.

ORGANISATIONS' ENERGY MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY DRIVERS

	Pre-Covid-19	Post-Covid-19
Corporate responsibility	67%	61%
Climate change	28%	43%
Savings from previous projects	43%	39%

COVID-19 IMPACT ON FUTURE ENERGY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

I think that there will be a greater drive to ensure meters can be read remotely, and BEMS systems should be easy to interrogate and allow managers to maintain a comfortable working environment for a much smaller on-site work force. There will be a significant pressure to produce savings and to demonstrate that running costs are being kept under control, whether that is for water, energy or any other consumables.

On the plus side - work practices and remote working will be re-evaluated. However, on the negative side - despite the buildings being closed, we are still running at 50% energy load due to the 'critical services'.

There will be a lot of pressure to reduce cost in all areas. Saving energy in its simplest form equates to free money so I believe there will be a much bigger focus on energy reduction in the coming months/years.

I feel there are two alternatives based on Board of Directors enlightenment. We either step back 5 years or forward 2 years. The whole Covid-19 situation is incomparable with past events and unforecastable in the short term. It's a complete hiatus.

We will have to be prepared to be more flexible in all aspects - sudden shut downs, how and where we work, how all our processes work. We will have to make as many processes as possible doable remotely, just in case.

The need for the ability for remote monitoring will increase.

I think it will strengthen our focus on energy management as we control our costs. Procurement and granular data management will be key to this cost control.

COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNT

Understanding consumption patterns and profiles better to understand what changes will take place by such a large scale shut down.

That a good range of emergency preparedness strategies already in place will stand you in good stead.

There will be far more remote working, reducing site loads marginally and air/car miles massively.

The ability to adapt.

Looking at the HH data for sites and seeing during the lock down what the 'true' baselines are and what can be done to further reduce energy waste. We also need to learn that flexible working can make a difference with tools such as teams etc. increasing productivity and reducing carbon footprints by reduced travel emissions.

Remote working, less travel, reduced office overheads.

More automation in meter readings would allow accurate billing, even if no one is on site to take readings. Technology had moved quicker than our working practices and we don't need to be in the office, for even the majority of time. Saying that, face to face and offline chats are really important still. We do still need to spend time together.

Strong relationships have been formed within the team who have not been furloughed. Team who have not before been involved in energy management have become a very effective group. This should not be lost as we get back to normal trading.

NET ZERO - 3 MAIN CHALLENGES FOR YOUR ORGANISATION GOING FORWARD

1. **FINANCES**
2. **TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS**
3. **LACK OF SKILLS**

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